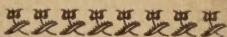


W. E. HENLEY

LONDON
VOLUNTARIES

Mdccccx



Mount Allison Ladies College
Library

From
a fund established in 1905 by
Raymond Clave Archibald
In Memory of his Mother



Mary Mellish
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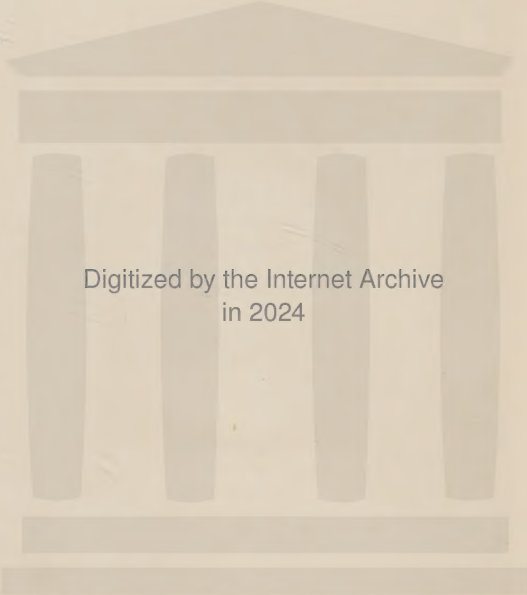
Graduate, M.L.A. 1867
Teacher, 1869 - 71.
Chief Preceptress, 1871 - 73.
Lady Principal 1885-January 1901.

Rec'd 1912-1914

M. M. A. M. L.

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LONDON VOLUNTARIES
AND OTHER POEMS



THE LOST LEADER

*Hail and farewell! Through gold of sunset glowing,
Brave as of old your ship puts forth to sea;
We stand upon the shore to watch your going,
Dreaming of years long gone, of years to be.*

*The ship sails forth, but not from our remembrance,
We who were once of your ship's company:
Master of many a strong and splendid semblance,
Where shall we find another like to thee?*

*Your ship sets sail. Whate'er the end restore you,
Or golden Isles, or Night without a star,
Never, Great-Heart, has braver barque before you
Or sailed, or fought, or crossed the soundless bar.*

ROSAMUND MARRIOTT WATSON.

July 18, 1903.

LONDON VOLUNTARIES
AND OTHER POEMS BY
WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY



PORTLAND MAINE
THOMAS B MOSHER
MDCCCCX

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FOREWORD



WITH this volume the Lyric Garland Series of reprints of Henley's *Poems* comes to an end. It covers all that he saw fit—and it was his matured judgment—to include in his revised collection of poems issued in 1898. What he then said should be given entire :

My friend and publisher, Mr. Alfred Nutt, asks me to introduce this re-issue of old work in a new shape. At his request, then, I have to say that nearly all the numbers contained in the present volume are reprinted from A Book of Verses (1888), and London Voluntaries (1892-3). From the first of these I have removed some copies of verses which seemed to me scarce worth keeping; and I have recovered for it certain others from those publications which had made room for them. I have corrected where I could, added such dates as I might, and,

FOREWORD

by re-arrangement and revision, done my best to give my book, such as it is, its final form. If any be displeased by the result, I can but submit that my verses are my own, and that this is how I would have them read.

*The work of revision has reminded me that, small as is this book of mine, it is all in the matter of verse that I have to show for the years between 1872 and 1897. A principal reason is that, after spending the better part of my life in the pursuit of poetry, I found myself (about 1877) so utterly unmarketable that I had to own myself beaten in art, and to addict myself to journalism for the next ten years. Came the production by my old friend, Mr. H. B. Donkin, in his little book of *Voluntaries* (1888), done for that East-End Hospital to which he has devoted so much time and energy and skill, of those unrhyming rhythms in which I had tried to quintessentialize, as (I believe) one scarce can do in rhyme, my memories of the Old Edinburgh Infirmary. They had long since been rejected by every editor of standing in London — I had well-nigh said in the world; but as soon as Mr. Nutt had read them, he entreated me to look for more. I did as I was told; old dusty sheaves*

FOREWORD

were dragged to light ; the work of selection and correction was begun ; I burned much ; I found that, after all, the lyrical instinct had slept — not died ; I ventured (in brief) A Book of Verses. It was received with so much interest that I took heart once more, and wrote the numbers presently reprinted from The National Observer in the collection first (1892) called The Song of the Sword and afterwards (1893) London Voluntaries. If I have said nothing since, it is that I have nothing to say which is not, as yet, too personal — too personal and too afflicting — for utterance.

For the matter of my book, it is there to speak for itself: —

*"Here's a sigh to those who love me
And a smile to those who hate."*

I refer to it for the simple pleasure of reflecting that it has made me many friends and some enemies.

W. E. H.

Muswell Hill, 4th September 1897.





LONDON VOLUNTARIES
(To Charles Whibley)




1890-1892



I

Grave

 T. Margaret's bells,
Quiring their innocent, old-world
canticles,
Sing in the storied air
All rosy-and-golden, as with memories
Of woods at evensong, and sands and seas
Disconsolate for that the night is nigh.
O, the low, lingering lights ! The large last gleam
(Hark ! how those brazen choristers cry and call !)
Touching these solemn ancientries, and there,
The silent River ranging tide-mark high
And the callow, grey-faced Hospital,
With the strange glimmer and glamour of a dream !
The Sabbath peace is in the slumbrous trees,
And from the wistful, the fast-widowing sky
(Hark ! how those plangent comforters call and cry !)
Falls as in August plots late roseleaves fall.
The sober Sabbath stir —
Leisurely voices, desultory feet ! —

Comes from the dry, dust-coloured street,
Where in their summer frocks the girls go by,
And sweethearts lean and loiter and confer,
Just as they did an hundred years ago,
Just as an hundred years to come they will : —
When you and I, Dear Love, lie lost and low,
And sweet-throats none our welkin shall fulfil,
Nor any sunset fade serene and slow ;
But, being dead, we shall not grieve to die.

II

Andante con moto

FORTH from the dust and din,
 The crush, the heat, the many-spotted glare,
 'The odour and sense of life and lust aflare,
 The wrangle and jangle of unrests,
 Let us take horse, Dear Heart, take horse and win—
 As from swart August to the green lap of May—
 To quietness and the fresh and fragrant breasts
 Of the still, delicious night, not yet aware
 In any of her innumerable nests
 Of that first sudden splash of dawn,
 Clear, sapphirine, luminous, large,
 Which tells that soon the flowing springs of day
 In deep and ever deeper eddies drawn
 Forward and up, in wider and wider way
 Shall float the sands and brim the shores
 On this our lith of the World, as round it roars
 And spins into the outlook of the Sun
 (The Lord's first gift, the Lord's especial charge),
 With light, with living light, from marge to marge
 Until the course He set and staked be run.

Through street and square, through square and street,
 Each with his home-grown quality of dark
 And violated silence, loud and fleet,
 Waylaid by a merry ghost at every lamp,

The hansom wheels and plunges. Hark, O, hark,
Sweet, how the old mare's bit and chain
Ring back a rough refrain
Upon the marked and cheerful tramp
Of her four shoes! Here is the Park,
And O, the languid midsummer wafts adust,
The tired midsummer blooms!
O, the mysterious distances, the glooms
Romantic, the august
And solemn shapes! At night this City of Trees
Turns to a tryst of vague and strange
And monstrous Majesties,
Let loose from some dim underworld to range
These terrene vistas till their twilight sets:
When, dispossessed of wonderfulness, they stand
Beggared and common, plain to all the land
For stooks of leaves! And lo! the Wizard Hour,
His silent, shining sorcery winged with power!
Still, still the streets, between their carcanets
Of linking gold, are avenues of sleep.
But see how gable ends and parapets
In gradual beauty and significance
Emerge! And did you hear
That little twitter-and-cheep,
Breaking inordinately loud and clear
On this still, spectral, exquisite atmosphere?
'Tis a first nest at matins! And behold
A rakehell cat—how furtive and acold!

A spent witch homing from some infamous dance —
Obscene, quick-trotting, see her tip and fade
Through shadowy railings into a pit of shade !
And now ! a little wind and shy,
The smell of ships (that earnest of romance),
A sense of space and water, and thereby
A lamplit bridge ouching the troubled sky,
And look, O, look ! a tangle of silver gleams
And dusky lights, our River and all his dreams,
His dreams that never save in our deaths can die.

What miracle is happening in the air,
Charging the very texture of the grey
With something luminous and rare ?
The night goes out like an ill-parcelled fire,
And, as one lights a candle, it is day.
The extinguisher, that perks it like a spire
On the little formal church, is not yet green
Across the water : but the house-tops nigher,
The corner-lines, the chimneys — look how clean,
How new, how naked ! See the batch of boats,
Here at the stairs, washed in the fresh-sprung beam !
And those are barges that were goblin floats,
Black, hag-steered, fraught with devilry and dream !
And in the piles the water frolics clear,
The ripples into loose rings wander and flee,
And we — we can behold that could but hear
The ancient River singing as he goes

New-mailed in morning to the ancient Sea.
The gas burns lank and jaded in its glass :
The old Ruffian soon shall yawn himself awake,
And light his pipe, and shoulder his tools, and take
His hobnailed way to work !

Let us too pass —
Pass ere the sun leaps and your shadow shows —
Through these long, blindfold rows
Of casements staring blind to right and left,
Each with his gaze turned inward on some piece
Of life in death's own likeness — Life bereft
Of living looks as by the Great Release —
Pass to an exquisite night's more exquisite close !

Reach upon reach of burial — so they feel,
These colonies of dreams ! And as we steal
Homeward together, but for the buxom breeze
Fitfully frolicking to heel,
With news of dawn-drenched woods and tumb-
ling seas,
We might — thus awed, thus lonely that we are —
Be wandering some dispeopled star,
Some world of memories and unbroken graves,
So broods the abounding Silence near and far :
Till even your footfall craves
Forgiveness of the majesty it braves.

III

Scherzando

DOWN through the ancient Strand
The spirit of October, mild and boon
And sauntering, takes his way
This golden end of afternoon,
As though the corn stood yellow in all the land
And the ripe apples dropped to the harvest-moon.

Lo ! the round sun, half-down the western slope —
Seen as along an unglazed telescope —
Lingers and lolls, loth to be done with day :
Gifting the long, lean, lanky street
And its abounding confluences of being
With aspects generous and bland ;
Making a thousand harnesses to shine
As with new ore from some enchanted mine,
And every horse's coat so full of sheen
He looks new-tailored, and every 'bus feels clean,
And never a hansom but is worth the feeing ;
And every jeweller within the pale
Offers a real Arabian Night for sale ;
And even the roar
Of the strong streams of toil, that pause and pour
Eastward and westward, sounds suffused —
Seems as it were bemused
And blurred, and like the speech

Of lazy seas on a lotus-haunted beach —
With this enchanted lustrousness,
This mellow magic, that (as a man's caress
Brings back to some faded face, beloved before,
A heavenly shadow of the grace it wore
Ere the poor eyes were minded to beseech)
Old things transfigures, and you hail and bless
Their looks of long-lapsed loveliness once more :
Till Clement's, angular and cold and staid,
Gleams forth in glamour's very stuffs arrayed ;
And Bride's, her æry, unsubstantial charm
Through flight on flight of springing, soaring stone
Grown flushed and warm,
Laughs into life full-mooded and fresh-blown ;
And the high majesty of Paul's
Uplifts a voice of living light, and calls —
Calls to his millions to behold and see
How goodly this his London Town can be !

For earth and sky and air
Are golden everywhere,
And golden with a gold so suave and fine
The looking on it lifts the heart like wine.
Trafalgar Square
(The fountains volleying golden glaze)
Shines like an angel-market. High aloft
Over his couchant Lions in a haze
Shimmering and bland and soft,

A dust of chrysoprase,
Our Sailor takes the golden gaze
Of the saluting sun, and flames superb
As once he flamed it on his ocean round.
The dingy dreariness of the picture-place,
Turned very nearly bright,
Takes on a luminous transiency of grace,
And shows no more a scandal to the ground.
The very blind man pottering on the kerb,
Among the posies and the ostrich feathers
And the rude voices touched with all the weathers
Of the long, varying year,
Shares in the universal alms of light.
The windows, with their fleeting, flickering fires,
The height and spread of frontage shining sheer,
The quiring signs, the rejoicing roofs and spires —
'Tis El Dorado — El Dorado plain,
The Golden City! And when a girl goes by,
Look! as she turns her glancing head,
A call of gold is floated from her ear!
Golden, all golden! In a golden glory,
Long-lapsing down a golden coasted sky,
The day not dies but seems
Dispersed in wafts and drifts of gold, and shed
Upon a past of golden song and story
And memories of gold and golden dreams.

IV

Largo e mesto

OUT of the poisonous East,
 Over a continent of blight,
 Like a maleficent Influence released
 From the most squalid cellarage of hell,
 The Wind-Fiend, the abominable —
 The Hangman Wind that tortures temper and light —
 Comes slouching, sullen and obscene,
 Hard on the skirts of the embittered night ;
 And in a cloud unclean
 Of excremental humours, roused to strife
 By the operation of some ruinous change
 Wherever his evil mandate run and range
 Into a dire intensity of life,
 A craftsman at his bench, he settles down
 To the grim job of throttling London Town.

So, by a jealous lightlessness beset
 That might have oppressed the dragons of old time
 Crunching and groping in the abysmal slime,
 A cave of cut-throat thoughts and villainous dreams,
 Hag-rid and crying with cold and dirt and wet,
 The afflicted City, prone from mark to mark
 In shameful occultation, seems
 A nightmare labyrinthine, dim and drifting,
 With wavering gulfs and antic heights, and shifting,

Rent in the stuff of a material dark,
Wherein the lamplight, scattered and sick and pale,
Shows like the leper's living blotch of bale:
Uncoiling monstrous into street on street
Paven with perils, teeming with mischance,
Where man and beast go blindfold and in dread,
Working with oaths and threats and faltering feet
Somewhither in the hideousness ahead ;
Working through wicked airs and deadly dews
That make the laden robber grin askance
At the good places in his black romance,
And the poor, loitering harlot rather choose
Go pinched and pined to bed
Than lurk and shiver and curse her wretched way
From arch to arch, scouting some threepenny prey.

Forgot his dawns and far-flushed afterglows,
His green garlands and windy eyots forgot,
The old Father-River flows,
His watchfires cores of menace in the gloom,
As he came oozing from the Pit, and bore,
Sunk in his filthily transfigured sides,
Shoals of dishonoured dead to tumble and rot
In the squalor of the universal shore :
His voices sounding through the gruesome air
As from the Ferry where the Boat of Doom
With her blaspheming cargo reels and rides :
The while his children, the brave ships,

No more adventurous and fair,
Nor tripping it light of heel as home-bound brides,
But infamously enchanted,
Huddle together in the foul eclipse,
Or feel their course by inches desperately,
As through a tangle of alleys murder-haunted,
From sinister reach to reach out — out — to sea.

And Death the while —
Death with his well-worn, lean, professional smile,
Death in his threadbare working trim —
Comes to your bedside, unannounced and bland,
And with expert, inevitable hand
Feels at your windpipe, fingers you in the lung,
Or flicks the clot well into the labouring heart :
Thus signifying unto old and young,
However hard of mouth or wild of whim,
'Tis time — 'tis time by his ancient watch — to part
From books and women and talk and drink and art.
And you go humbly after him
To a mean suburban lodging : on the way
To what or where
Not Death, who is old and very wise, can say :
And you — how should you care
So long as, unreclaimed of hell,
The Wind-Fiend, the insufferable,
Thus vicious and thus patient, sits him down
To the black job of burking London Town?

V

Allegro maestoso

SPRING winds that blow
As over leagues of myrtle-blooms and may;
Bevies of spring clouds trooping slow,
Like matrons heavy bosomed and aglow
With the mild and placid pride of increase ! Nay,
What makes this insolent and comely stream
Of appetite, this freshet of desire
(Milk from the wild breasts of the wilful Day !),
Down Piccadilly dance and murmur and gleam
In genial wave on wave and gyre on gyre ?
Why does that nymph unparalleled splash and churn
The wealth of her enchanted urn
Till, over-billowing all between
Her cheerful margents, grey and living green,
It floats and wanders, glittering and fleeing,
An estuary of the joy of being ?
Why should the lovely leafage of the Park
Touch to an ecstasy the act of seeing ?
—Sure, sure, my paramour, my Bride of Brides,
Lingering and flushed, mysteriously abides
In some dim, eye-proof angle of odorous dark,
Some smiling nook of green-and-golden shade,
In the divine conviction robed and crowned
The globe fulfils his immemorial round
But as the marrying-place of all things made !

There is no man, this deifying day,
But feels the primal blessing in his blood.
There is no woman but disdains —
The sacred impulse of the May
Brightening like sex made sunshine through her veins—
To veil the ensigns of her womanhood.
None but, rejoicing, flaunts them as she goes,
Bounteous in looks of her delicious best,
On her inviolable quest :
These with their hopes, with their sweet secrets those,
But all desirable and frankly fair,
As each were keeping some most prosperous tryst,
And in the knowledge went imparadised !
For look ! a magical influence everywhere,
Look how the liberal and transfiguring air
Washes this inn of memorable meetings,
This centre of ravishments and gracious greetings,
Till, through its jocund loveliness of length
A tidal-race of lust from shore to shore,
A brimming reach of beauty met with strength,
It shines and sounds like some miraculous dream,
Some vision multitudinous and agleam,
Of happiness as it shall be evermore !

Praise God for giving
Through this His messenger among the days
His word the life He gave is thrice-worth living !
For Pan, the bountiful, imperious Pan —

Not dead, not dead, as impotent dreamers feigned,
But the gay genius of a million Mays
Renewing his beneficent endeavour!—
Still reigns and triumphs, as he hath triumphed
and reigned

Since in the dim blue dawn of time
The universal ebb-and-flow began,
To sound his ancient music, and prevails
By the persuasion of his mighty rhyme
Here in this radiant and immortal street
Lavishly and omnipotently as ever
In the open hills, the undissembling dales,
The laughing-places of the juvenile earth.
For lo! the wills of man and woman meet,
Meet and are moved, each unto each endeared
As once in Eden's prodigal bowers befell,
To share his shameless, elemental mirth
In one great act of faith: while deep and strong,
Incomparably nerved and cheered,
The enormous heart of London joys to beat
To the measures of his rough, majestic song;
The lewd, perennial, overmastering spell
That keeps the rolling universe ensphered,
And life, and all for which life lives to long
Wanton and wondrous and for ever well.





THE SONG OF THE SWORD
(To Rudyard Kipling)



1890



HE *Sword*
Singing —
The voice of the Sword from the
heart of the Sword
Clanging imperious
Forth from Time's battlements
His ancient and triumphing Song.

In the beginning,
Ere God inspired Himself
Into the clay thing
Thumb'd to His image,
The vacant, the naked shell
Soon to be Man :
Thoughtful He pondered it.
Prone there and impotent,
Fragile, inviting
Attack and discomfiture :
Then, with a smile —
As He heard in the Thunder
That laughed over Eden

The voice of the Trumpet,
The iron Beneficence,
Calling his dooms
To the winds of the world —
Stooping, He drew
On the sand with His finger
A shape for a sign
Of his way to the eyes
That in wonder should waken
For a proof of His will
To the breaking intelligence.
That was the birth of me :
I am the Sword.

Bleak and lean, grey and cruel,
Short-hilted, long shafted,
I froze into steel ;
And the blood of my elder,
His hand on the hafts of me,
Sprang like a wave
In the wind, as the sense
Of his strength grew to ecstasy ;
Glowed like a coal
In the throat of the furnace ;
As he knew me and named me
The War-Thing, the Comrade,
Father of honour
And giver of kingship,

The fame-smith, the song-master,
Bringer of women
On fire at his hands
For the pride of fulfilment,
Priest (saith the Lord)
Of his marriage with victory.
Ho ! then, the Trumpet,
Handmaid of heroes,
Calling the peers
To the place of espousals !
Ho ! then, the splendour
And glare of my ministry,
Clothing the earth
With a livery of lightnings !
Ho ! then, the music
Of battles in onset,
And ruining armours,
And God's gift returning
In fury to God !
Thrilling and keen
As the song of the winter stars,
Ho ! then, the sound
Of my voice, the implacable
Angel of Destiny !—
I am the Sword.

Heroes, my children,
Follow, O, follow me !

Follow, exulting
In the great light that breaks
From the sacred Companionship !
Thrust through the fatuous,
Thrust through the fungous brood,
Spawned in my shadow
And gross with my gift !
Thrust through, and hearken,
O, hark, to the Trumpet,
The Virgin of Battles,
Calling, still calling you
Into the Presence,
Sons of the Judgment,
Pure wafts of the Will !
Edged to annihilate,
Hilted with government,
Follow, O, follow me,
Till the waste places
All the grey globe over
Ooze, as the honeycomb
Drips, with the sweetness
Distilled of my strength,
And, teeming in peace
Through the wrath of my coming,
They give back in beauty
The dread and the anguish
They had of me visitant !
Follow, O follow, then,

Heroes, my harvesters !
Where the tall grain is ripe
Thrust in your sickles !
Stripped and adust
In a stubble of empire,
Scything and binding
The full sheaves of sovranity :
Thus, O, thus gloriously,
Shall you fulfil yourselves !
Thus, O, thus mightily,
Show yourselves sons of mine —
Yea, and win grace of me :
I am the Sword !

I am the feast-maker :
Hark, through a noise
Of the screaming of eagles,
Hark how the Trumpet,
The mistress of mistresses,
Calls, silver-throated
And stern, where the tables
Are spread, and the meal
Of the Lord is in hand !
Driving the darkness,
Even as the banners
And spears of the Morning ;
Sifting the nations,
The slag from the metal,

The waste and the weak
From the fit and the strong ;
Fighting the brute,
The abysmal Fecundity ;
Checking the gross,
Multitudinous blunders,
The groping, the purblind
Excesses in service
Of the Womb universal,
The absolute drudge ;
Firing the charactry
Carved on the World,
The miraculous gem
In the seal-ring that burns
On the hand of the Master —
Yea ! and authority
Flames through the dim,
Unappeasable Grisliness
Prone down the nethermost
Chasms of the Void ! —
Clear singing, clean slicing ;
Sweet spoken, soft finishing ;
Making death beautiful,
Life but a coin
To be staked in the pastime
Whose playing is more
Than the transfer of being ;
Arch-anarch, chief builder,

Prince and evangelist,
I am the Will of God :
I am the Sword.

The Sword

Singing —

*The voice of the Sword from the heart of the Sword
Clanging majestic,
As from the starry-staired
Courts of the primal Supremacy,
His high, irresistible song.*





BRIC-À-BRAC



1877-1888

“ *The tune of the time.*” — Hamlet, *concerning*
Osric



BALLADE OF A TOYOKUNI COL- OUR PRINT

TO W. A.

WAS I a Samurai renowned,
Two-sworded, fierce, immense of bow?
A histrion angular and profound?
A priest? a porter? — Child, although
I have forgotten clean, I know

That in the shade of Fujisan,
What time the cherry-orchards blow,
I loved you once in old Japan.

As here you loiter, flowing-gowned
And hugely sashed, with pins a-row
Your quaint head as with flamelets crowned,
Demure, inviting — even so,
When merry maids in Miyako
To feel the sweet o' the year began,
And green gardens to overflow,
I loved you once in old Japan.

Clear shine the hills ; the rice-fields round
Two cranes are circling ; sleepy and slow,
A blue canal the lake's blue bound
Breaks at the bamboo bridge ; and lo !
Touched with the sundown's spirit and glow,
I see you turn, with flirted fan,
Against the plum-tree's bloomy snow. . . .
I loved you once in old Japan !

ENVOY

Dear, 'twas a dozen lives ago ;
But that I was a lucky man
The Toyokuni here will show :
I loved you — once — in old Japan.

BALLADE OF YOUTH AND AGE

(DOUBLE REFRAIN)

TO T. E. B.

SPRING at her height on a morn at prime,
Sails that laugh from a flying squall,
Pomp of harmony, rapture of rhyme —
Youth is the sign of them, one and all.
Winter sunsets and leaves that fall,
An empty flagon, a folded page,
A tumble-down wheel, a tattered ball —
These are a type of the world of Age.

Bells that clash in a gaudy chime,
Swords that clatter in onsets tall,
The words that ring and the fames that climb —
Youth is the sign of them, one and all.
Hymnals old in a dusty stall,
A bald, blind bird in a crazy cage,
The scene of a faded festival —
These are a type of the world of Age.

Hours that strut as the heirs of time,
Deeds whose rumour's a clarion-call,
Songs where the singers their souls sublime —
Youth is the sign of them, one and all.

A staff that rests in a nook of wall,
A reeling battle, a rusted gage,
The chant of a nearing funeral —
These are a type of the world of Age.

ENVOY

Struggle and turmoil, revel and brawl —
Youth is the sign of them, one and all.
A smouldering hearth and a silent stage —
These are a type of the world of Age.

BALLADE OF MIDSUMMER DAYS AND NIGHTS

(DOUBLE REFRAIN)

TO W. H.

WITH a ripple of leaves and a tinkle of streams
The full world rolls in a rhythm of praise,
And the winds are one with the clouds and beams —
Midsummer days! Midsummer days!
The dusk grows vast; in a purple haze,
While the West from a rapture of sunset rights,
Faint stars their exquisite lamps upraise —
Midsummer nights! O midsummer nights!

The wood's green heart is a nest of dreams,
The lush grass thickens and springs and sways,
The rathe wheat rustles, the landscape gleams —
Midsummer days! Midsummer days!
In the stilly fields, in the stilly ways,
All secret shadows and mystic lights,
Late lovers murmur and linger and gaze —
Midsummer nights! O midsummer nights!

There's a music of bells from the trampling teams,
Wild skylarks hover, the gorses blaze,
The rich, ripe rose as with incense steams —
Midsummer days! Midsummer days!

A soul from the honeysuckle strays,
And the nightingale as from prophet heights
Sings to the Earth of her million Mays—
Midsummer nights ! O midsummer nights !

ENVOY

And it 's O, for my dear and the charm that stays —
Midsummer days ! Midsummer days !
It 's O, for my Love and the dark that plights —
Midsummer nights ! O midsummer nights !

BALLADE OF DEAD ACTORS

TO E. J. H.

WHERE are the passions they essayed,
And where the tears they made to flow?
Where the wild humours they portrayed
For laughing worlds to see and know?
Othello's wrath and Juliet's woe?
Sir Peter's whims and Timon's gall?
And Millamant and Romeo?
Into the night go one and all.

Where are the braveries, fresh or frayed?
The plumes, the armours — friend and foe?
The cloth of gold, the rare brocade,
The mantles glittering to and fro?
The pomp, the pride, the royal show?
The cries of war and festival?
The youth, the grace, the charm, the glow?
Into the night go one and all.

The curtain falls, the play is played :
The Beggar packs beside the Beau ;
The Monarch troops, and troops the Maid ;
The Thunder huddles with the Snow.

Where are the revellers high and low?
The clashing swords? The lover's call?
The dancers gleaming row on row?
Into the night go one and all.

ENVOY

Prince, in one common overthrow
The Hero tumbles with the Thrall :
As dust that drives, as straws that blow,
Into the night go one and all.

BALLADE MADE IN THE HOT
WEATHER

TO C. M.

FOUNTAINS that frisk and sprinkle
The moss they overspill ;
Pools that the breezes crinkle ;
The wheel beside the mill,
With its wet, weedy frill ;
Wind-shadows in the wheat ;
A water-cart in the street ;
The fringe of foam that girds
An islet's ferneries ;
A green sky's minor thirds —
To live, I think of these !

Of ice and glass the tinkle,
Pellucid, silver-shrill ;
Peaches without a wrinkle ;
Cherries and snow at will,
From china bowls that fill
The senses with a sweet
Incuriousness of heat ;
A melon's dripping sherds ;
Cream-clotted strawberries ;
Dusk dairies set with curds —
To live, I think of these !

Vale-lily and periwinkle ;
Wet stone-crop on the sill ;
The look of leaves a-twinkle
With windlets clear and still ;
The feel of a forest rill
That wimples fresh and fleet
About one's naked feet ;
The muzzles of drinking herds ;
Lush flags and bulrushes ;
The chirp of rain-bound birds —
To live, I think of these !

ENVOY

Dark aisles, new packs of cards,
Mermaidens' tails, cool swards,
Dawn dewes and starlit seas,
White marbles, whiter words —
To live, I think of these !

BALLADE OF TRUISMS

GOLD or silver every day,
Dies to grey.

There are knots in every skein.

Hours of work and hours of play
Fade away

Into one immense Inane.

Shadow and substance, chaff and grain,
Are as vain

As the foam or as the spray.

Life goes crooning, faint and fain,
One refrain —

“If it could be always May!”

Though the earth be green and gay,

Though, they say,

Man the cup of heaven may drain;

Though, his little world to sway,

He display

Hoard on hoard of pith and brain:

Autumn brings a mist and rain

That constrain

Him and his to know decay,

Where undimmed the lights that wane

Would remain,

If it could be always May.

Yea, alas, must turn to *Nay*,
Flesh to Clay.
Chance and Time are ever twain.
Men may scoff, and men may pray,
But they pay
Every pleasure with a pain.
Life may soar, and Fortune deign
To explain
Where her prizes hide and stay ;
But we lack the lusty train
We should gain,
If it could be always May.

ENVOY

Time, the pedagogue, his cane
Might retain,
But his charges all would stray
Truanting in every lane —
Jack with Jane —
If it could be always May.

DOUBLE BALLADE OF THE NOTHINGNESS OF 'THINGS

THE big teetotum twirls,
And epochs wax and wane
As chance subsides or swirls ;
But of the loss and gain
The sum is always plain.
Read on the mighty pall,
The weed of funeral
That covers praise and blame,
The -isms and the -anities,
Magnificence and shame : —
“O Vanity of Vanities !”

The Fates are subtile girls !
They give us chaff for grain.
And Time, the Thunderer, hurls,
Like bolted death, disdain
At all that heart and brain
Conceive, or great or small,
Upon this earthly ball.
Would you be knight and dame ?
Or woo the sweet humanities ?
Or illustrate a name ?
O Vanity of Vanities !

We sound the sea for pearls,
Or drown them in a drain ;
We flute it with the merles,
Or tug and sweat and strain ;
We grovel, or we reign ;
We saunter, or we brawl ;
We answer, or we call ;
We search the stars for Fame,
Or sink her subterraneanities ;
The legend 's still the same : —
“ O Vanity of Vanities ! ”

Here at the wine one birls,
There some one clanks a chain.
The flag that this man furls
That man to float is fain.
Pleasure gives place to pain :
These in the kennel crawl,
While others take the wall.
She has a glorious aim,
He lives for the inanities.
What comes of every claim ?
O Vanity of Vanities !

Alike are clods and earls.
For sot, and seer, and swain,
For emperors and for churls,
For antidote and bane,

There is but one refrain:
But one for king and thrall,
For David and for Saul,
For fleet of foot and lame,
For pieties and profanities,
The picture and the frame : —
“ O Vanity of Vanities ! ”

Life is a smoke that curls —
Curls in a flickering skein,
That winds and whisks and whirls,
A figment thin and vain,
Into the vast Inane.
One end for hut and hall !
One end for cell and stall !
Burned in one common flame
Are wisdoms and insanities.
For this alone we came : —
“ O Vanity of Vanities ! ”

ENVOY

Prince, pride must have a fall.
What is the worth of all
Your state's supreme urbanities?
Bad at the best 's the game.
Well might the Sage exclaim : —
“ O Vanity of Vanities ! ”

DOUBLE BALLADE OF LIFE AND FATE

FOOLS may pine, and sots may swill,
Cynics gibe, and prophets rail,
Moralists may scourge and drill,
Preachers prose, and fainthearts quail.
Let them whine, or threat, or wail !
Till the touch of Circumstance
Down to darkness sink the scale,
Fate 's a fiddler, Life 's a dance.

What if skies be wan and chill?
What if winds be harsh and stale?
Presently the east will thrill,
And the sad and shrunken sail,
Bellying with a kindly gale,
Bear you sunwards, while your chance
Sends you back the hopeful hail : —
“ Fate 's a fiddler, Life 's a dance.”

Idle shot or coming bill,
Hapless love or broken bail,
Gulp it (never chew your pill !),
And, if Burgundy should fail,
Try the humbler pot of ale !
Over all is heaven's expanse.

Gold 's to find among the shale.
Fate 's a fiddler, Life 's a dance.

Dull Sir Joskin sleeps his fill,
Good Sir Galahad seeks the Grail,
Proud Sir Pertinax flaunts his frill,
Hard Sir Æger dints his mail;
And the while by hill and dale
Tristram's braveries gleam and glance,
And his blithe horn tells its tale : —
“ Fate 's a fiddler, Life 's a dance.”

Araminta 's grand and shrill,
Delia 's passionate and frail,
Doris drives an earnest quill,
Athanasia takes the veil :
Wiser Phyllis o'er her pail,
At the heart of all romance
Reading, sings to Strephon's flail : —
“ Fate 's a fiddler, Life 's a dance.”

Every Jack must have his Jill,
(Even Johnson had his Thrale!) :
Forward, couples — with a will !
This, the world, is not a jail.
Hear the music, sprat and whale !
Hands across, retire, advance !
Though the doomsman 's on your trail,
Fate 's a fiddler, Life 's a dance.

ENVOY

Boys and girls, at slug and snail
And their kindred look askance.
Pay your footing on the nail :
Fate 's a fiddler, Life 's a dance.

AT QUEENSFERRY

TO W. G. S.

THE blackbird sang, the skies were clear and clean,
We bowled along a road that curved its spine
Superbly sinuous and serpentine
Thro' silent symphonies of summer green.
Sudden the Forth came on us — sad of mien,
No cloud to colour it, no breeze to line :
A sheet of dark, dull glass, without a sign
Of life or death, two beams of sand between.
Water and sky merged blank in mist together,
The Fort loomed spectral, and the Guardship's spars
Traced vague, black shadows on the shimmery glaze :
We felt the dim, strange years, the grey, strange weather,
The still, strange land, unvexed of sun or stars,
Where Lancelot rides clanking thro' the haze.

ORIENTALE

SHE 'S an enchanting little Israelite,
A world of hidden dimples ! — Dusky-eyed,
A starry-glancing daughter of the Bride,
With hair escaped from some Arabian Night,
Her lip is red, her cheek is golden-white,
Her nose a scimitar ; and, set aside
The bamboo hat she cocks with so much pride,
Her dress a dream of daintiness and delight.
And when she passes with the dreadful boys
And romping girls, the cockneys loud and crude,
My thought, to the Minories tied yet moved to range
The Land o' the Sun, commingles with the noise
Of magian drums and scents of sandalwood
A touch Sidonian — modern — brilliant — strange !

IN FISHERROW

A HARD north-easter fifty winters long
Has bronzed and shrivelled sere her face and neck;
Her locks are wild and grey, her teeth a wreck;
Her foot is vast, her bowed leg spare and strong.
A wide blue cloak, a squat and sturdy throng
Of curt blue coats, a mutch without a speck,
A white vest broidered black, her person deck,
Nor seems their picked, stern, old-world quaintness wrong.
Her great creel forehead-slung, she wanders nigh,
Easing the heavy strap with gnarled, brown fingers,
The spirit of traffic watchful in her eye,
Ever and anon imploring you to buy,
As looking down the street she onward lingers,
Reproachful, with a strange and doleful cry.

BACK-VIEW

TO D. F.

I WATCHED you saunter down the sand :
Serene and large, the golden weather
Flowed radiant round your peacock feather,
And glistered from your jewelled hand.
Your tawny hair, turned strand on strand
And bound with blue ribands together,
Streaked the rough tartan, green like heather
That round your lissome shoulder spanned.
Your grace was quick my sense to seize :
The quaint looped hat, the twisted tresses,
The close-drawn scarf, and under these
The flowing, flapping draperies —
My thought and outline still caresses,
Enchanting, comic, Japanese !

CROQUIS

TO G. W.

THE beach was crowded. Pausing now and then,
He groped and fiddled doggedly along,
His worn face glaring on the thoughtless throng
The stony peevishness of sightless men.
He seemed scarce older than his clothes. Again,
Grotesquing thinly many an old sweet song,
So cracked his fiddle, his hand so frail and wrong,
You hardly could distinguish one in ten.
He stopped at last, and sat him on the sand,
And, grasping wearily his bread-winner,
Stared dim towards the blue immensity,
Then leaned his head upon his poor old hand.
He may have slept: he did not speak nor stir:
His gesture spoke a vast despondency.

ATTADALE WEST HIGHLANDS

TO A. J.

A BLACK and glassy float, opaque and still,
The loch, at furthest ebb supine in sleep,
Reversing, mirrored in its luminous deep
The calm grey skies ; the solemn spurs of hill ;
Heather, and corn, and wisps of loitering haze ;
The wee white cots, black-hatted, plumed with smoke ;
The braes beyond — and when the ripple awoke,
They wavered with the jarred and wavering glaze.
The air was hushed and dreamy. Evermore
A noise of running water whispered near.
A straggling crow called high and thin. A bird
Trilled from the birch-leaves. Round the shingled shore,
Yellow with weed, there wandered, vague and clear,
Strange vowels, mysterious gutturals, idly heard.

FROM A WINDOW IN PRINCES
STREET

TO M. M. M'B.

ABOVE the Craggs that fade and gloom
Starts the bare knee of Arthur's Seat ;
Ridged high against the evening bloom,
The Old Town rises, street on street ;
With lamps bejewelled, straight ahead,
Like rampired walls the houses lean,
All spired and domed and turreted,
Sheer to the valley's darkling green ;
Ranged in mysterious disarray,
The Castle, menacing and austere,
Looms through the lingering last of day ;
And in the silver dusk you hear,
Reverberated from crag and scar,
Bold bugles blowing points of war.

IN THE DIALS

TO *Garryowen* upon an organ ground
Two girls are jigging. Riotously they trip,
With eyes aflame, quick bosoms, hand on hip,
As in the tumult of a witches' round.
Youngsters and youngsters round them prance and bound.
Two solemn babes twirl ponderously, and skip.
The artist's teeth gleam from his bearded lip.
High from the kennel howls a tortured hound.
The music reels and hurtles, and the night
Is full of stinks and cries; a naphtha-light
Flares from a barrow; battered and obtused
With vices, wrinkles, life and work and rags,
Each with her inch of clay, two loitering hags
Look on dispassionate —critical — something 'mused.

THE gods are dead? Perhaps they are! Who knows?
Living at least in Lemprière undeleted,
The wise, the fair, the awful, the jocose,
Are one and all, I like to think, retreated
In some still land of lilacs and the rose.

Once high they sat, and high o'er earthly shows
With sacrificial dance and song were greeted.
Once . . . long ago. But now, the story goes,
The gods are dead.

It must be true. The world, a world of prose,
Full-crammed with facts, in science swathed and sheeted,
Nods in a stertorous after-dinner doze!
Plangent and sad, in every wind that blows
Who will may hear the sorry words repeated:—
“The Gods are Dead!”

TO F. W.

LET us be drunk, and for a while forget,
Forget, and, ceasing even from regret,
Live without reason and despite of rhyme,
As in a dream preposterous and sublime,
Where place and hour and means for once are met.

Where is the use of effort? Love and debt
And disappointment have us in a net.
Let us break out, and taste the morning prime . . .
Let us be drunk.

In vain our little hour we strut and fret,
And mouth our wretched parts as for a bet :
We cannot please the tragicaster Time.
To gain the crystal sphere, the silver clime,
Where Sympathy sits dimpling on us yet,
Let us be drunk !

WHEN you are old, and I am passed away —
Passed, and your face, your golden face, is grey—
I think, whate'er the end, this dream of mine,
Comforting you, a friendly star will shine
Down the dim slope where still you stumble and stray.

So may it be : that so dead Yesterday,
No sad-eyed ghost but generous and gay,
May serve you memories like almighty wine,
When you are old !

Dear Heart, it shall be so. Under the sway
Of death the past's enormous disarray
Lies hushed and dark. Yet though there come no sign,
Live on well pleased : immortal and divine
Love shall still tend you, as God's angels may,
When you are old.

BESIDE the idle summer sea
And in the vacant summer days,
Light Love came fluting down the ways,
Where you were loitering with me.

Who has not welcomed, even as we,
That jocund minstrel and his lays
Beside the idle summer sea
And in the vacant summer days?

We listened, we were fancy-free;
And lo! in terror and amaze
We stood alone — alone at gaze
With an implacable memory
Beside the idle summer sea.

I. M.

R. G. C. B.

(1878)

THE ways of Death are soothing and serene,
And all the words of Death are grave and sweet.
From camp and church, the fireside and the street,
She beckons forth — and strife and song have been.

A summer night descending cool and green
And dark on daytime's dust and stress and heat,
The ways of Death are soothing and serene,
And all the words of Death are grave and sweet.

O glad and sorrowful, with triumphant mien
And radiant faces look upon, and greet
This last of all your lovers, and to meet
Her kiss, the Comforter's, your spirit lean. . . .
The ways of Death are soothing and serene.

WE shall surely die :
Must we needs grow old ?
Grow old and cold,
And we know not why ?

O, the By-and-By,
And the tale that 's told !
We shall surely die :
Must we needs grow old ?

Grow old and sigh,
Grudge and withhold,
Resent and scold ? . . .
Not you and I ?
We shall surely die !

WHAT is to come we know not. But we know
That what has been was good — was good to
show,

Better to hide, and best of all to bear.

We are the masters of the days that were.

We have lived, we have loved, we have suffered . . .
even so.

Shall we not take the ebb who had the flow ?

Life was our friend. Now, if it be our foe —

Dear, though it spoil and break us ! — need we care
What is to come ?

Let the great winds their worst and wildest blow,

Or the gold weather round us mellow slow :

We have fulfilled ourselves, and we can dare

And we can conquer, though we may not share

In the rich quiet of the afterglow

What is to come.



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